

A Brief History of the Bolsa Chica Military Reservation 1941-1948

Mark A. Berhow

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The first defenses to guard the entrance to Los Angeles harbor were built during the years 1915-1919 at Fort MacArthur in San Pedro. These defenses remained in use for the next 20 years. With the beginning of the fighting in Europe in 1939, the United States Army began to implement plans to replace the outdated coastal defenses around the nation, including those at Los Angeles.

Previous to December 1941, there were no military defenses south of San Pedro. In December 1941, the Army brought in mobile 155-millimeter and 75-millimeter guns in addition to 3-inch antiaircraft guns to guard the vulnerable beaches around Los Angeles, protecting the Los Angeles area from possible raids or invasion by the Japanese. The Army sent Coast Artillery units to Orange County beaches along with these guns. One unit moved into the buildings of the Bolsa Chica Gun Club on the Bolsa Chica Mesa. Two 155 mm GPF tractor drawn guns were sited in field emplacements along the shoreline of the estuary. Beginning in December, two permanent circular concrete "Panama" mounts were built near the gun club for mounting the 155 mm guns. The construction was completed on February 1942.

The United States Army received authorization to modernize the harbor defense of the major harbors of the United States and its territories in 1940. It was also the most uniform program, in that two basic battery designs, one two gun battery design for the large caliber guns (mostly 16-inch but some 12-inch) and one two gun battery design for the medium caliber guns were used with little variation for all the new gun batteries to be built.

Under the 1940 Program, the Harbor Defenses of Los Angeles was to receive two 16 inch gun batteries and three 6-inch gun batteries, along with their supporting fire control stations and the newly developed radar fire control stations. As the new defenses were designed to protect a much larger area than the original defenses built at Fort MacArthur, the new gun batteries were dispersed along the coastline to afford protection to the approaches to the Los Angeles harbor area. One 6-inch battery was located at Point Vicente to the north on the Palos Verdes Peninsula, one 16-inch battery was located on the hillside above White Point in San Pedro, another 6-inch battery was built above Point Fermin on the Upper Reservation of Fort MacArthur and the final 6-inch battery and 16 inch battery were built on the Bolsa Chica mesa to guard the southern approach to the harbor area.

The construction of the Bolsa Chica batteries began on April 17, 1943. Each battery had been assigned a construction number based on a numbering system used to describe the entire modernization program which was being implemented. The 16 inch battery was assigned Construction Number 128 and the 6-inch battery was assigned Construction Number 242. Construction proceeded apace for the rest of the year. In addition to the gun batteries, a separate underground structure, containing plotting and switchboard rooms (PSR) was built for Battery 128. Disguised as a oil rig, a large tower containing four fire control stations was built near the battery, and a radar installation was constructed near the PSR.

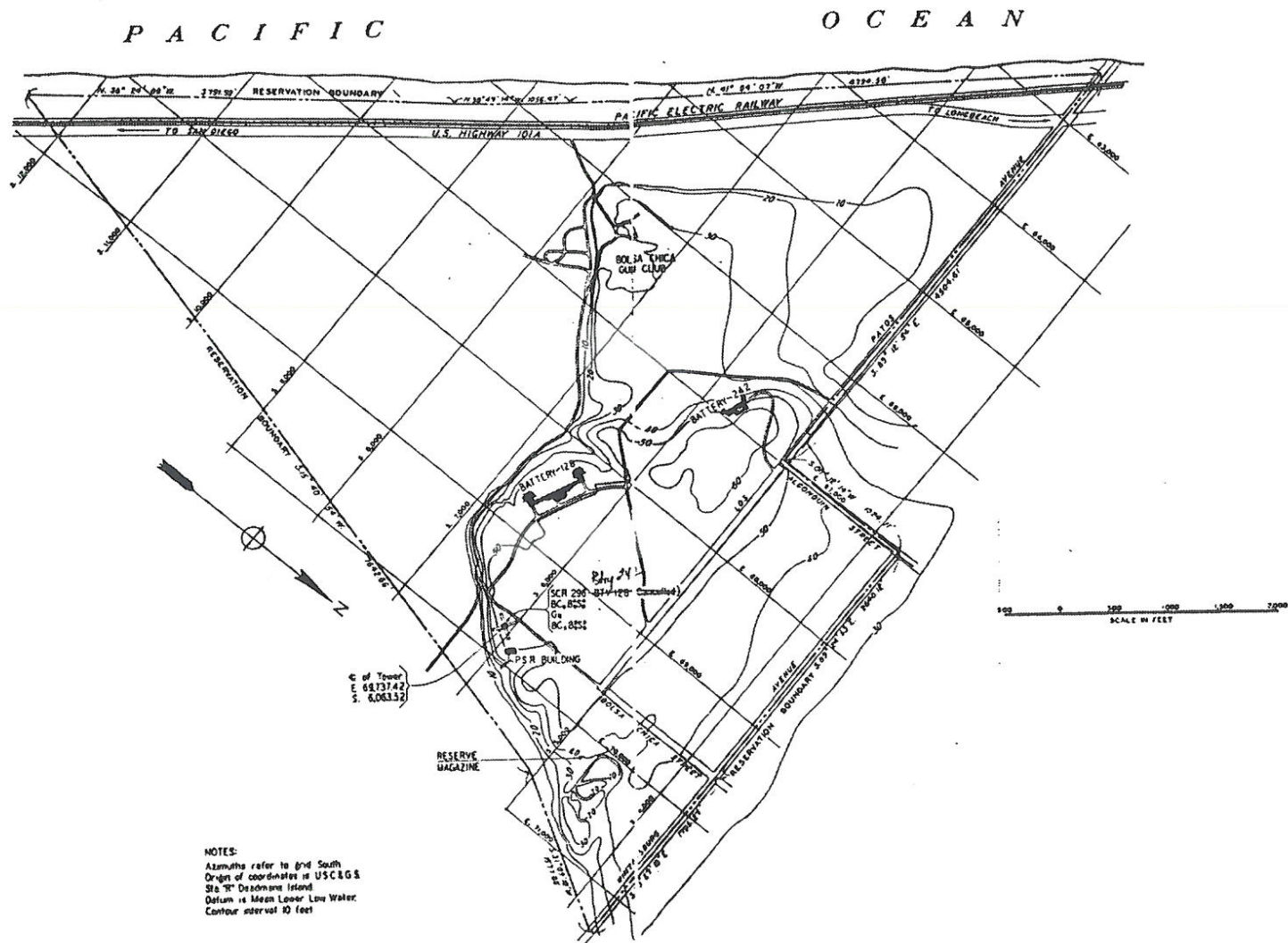
By the beginning of 1944, it was apparent that the threat of a possible Japanese invasion had vanished. Other military construction and supply programs were given priority and the construction of the new defenses was slowed. On January 21, 1944, the completion of Battery 128 was deferred. The concrete work was allowed to continue, but the delivery of the guns, carriages, and power equipment was canceled by the War Department. Work continued on Battery 242, however. The guns were installed and proof fired sometime in late 1944. General Order #51, issued on June 10, 1946, officially renamed Battery 242 as Battery Harry J. Harrison, after Major Harry J. Harrison who had been killed in action in Europe in 1944. Harrison had been stationed at Fort MacArthur during the years just prior to the beginning of World War II.

The end of the war brought a general reevaluation of the need for big seacoast guns to defend the nation's harbor. By 1948 the Army decided that the guns were no longer needed. The coastline would be better defended by airplanes and the new missiles. That year, a memorandum from the Army detailed the decommissioning of most of the remaining coastal defense batteries remaining around the nation. Battery 128 would never be completed and Battery Harrison was declared surplus and disarmed. The Army property at Bolsa Chica was returned to the original owners. The concrete bunkers, built to defend against an enemy that never came, were left empty and unused.

Map of Bolsa Chica Military Reservation on previous page— Fire Control Site #11 & SCR-296 #5, Bolsa Chica, Exhibit 12-B, Annexes to Harbor Defense Projects, Harbor Defenses of Los Angeles, California, copy provided by R.D. Zink.

References:

- The Harbor Defenses of Los Angeles, a Reference Manual, by Mark A. Berhow, Fort MacArthur Military Press, San Pedro, CA 1992.
- Annexes to the Harbor Defense Project, Harbor Defense of Los Angeles, U.S. Army report, July, 1944.
- Coast Artillery Seacoast Batteries, General Orders No. 51, War Department, June 10, 1946 "Harbor Defense Installations."
- AGAO-S 660.2, Department of the Army, Office of the Adjutant General's Office, May 14, 1948.



600,914 (Los Angeles) CM 72444
 REPORT OF COMPLETED WORKS SEACOAST FORTIFICATION
 (Batteries)

HARBOR DEFENSES OF LOS ANGELES
 FORT MAC ARTHUR (BOLSA CHICA)
 BATTERY PANAMA MOUNTS NO. OF GUNS 2
 CALIBER 155 MM CARRIAGE MOBILE

SPKCM-1

Part I Corrected to 3 December 1943

GENERAL:

Battery commenced: Dec. 1941
 Battery completed: Feb. 1942
 Date of transfer: 15 Nov. 1943
 Cost to date of transfer: \$8,783.43
 Materials of construction: Reinforced Concrete
 Battery new or modernized: New

Trunnion elevation in battery: Mobile
 Datum plane: Mean Lower Low Water

UTILITIES:

WATER SUPPLY

Source of: Extended from troop housing
 Alternate source: None
 Size of main: 3/4-inch

SEWER:

Connected to sewer: No
 Type of disposal: None
 Type of latrine: None

UTILITIES: (Contd.)
 ELECTRIC POWER
 Sources of: Extended from troop housing (See Remarks)
 Procured & installed by: Post Engineer
 Characteristics: Voltage 110 AC Phase: - -
 Number of units and capacity: None
 Max. K.W. required for utilities: See "Remarks"
 Max. K.W. required for nonbattle conditions: See "Remarks"
 Commercial power provided: No
 Auxiliary power unit provided: No
 Type of lighting fixtures: Vapor-proof (in magazines)
 Dehumidifying unit Make and capacity: None
 Rooms wet or dry: Dry
 How ventilated: Not ventilated
 How heated: Not heated
 DATA TRANSMISSION:
 Type: Field telephone

REMARKS:

Lighting for magazines & trenches installed by Post Engineer.
 Origin of local coordinates: Station "R"-(U.S.C. & G.S. Sta.)
 "Deadman's Island"

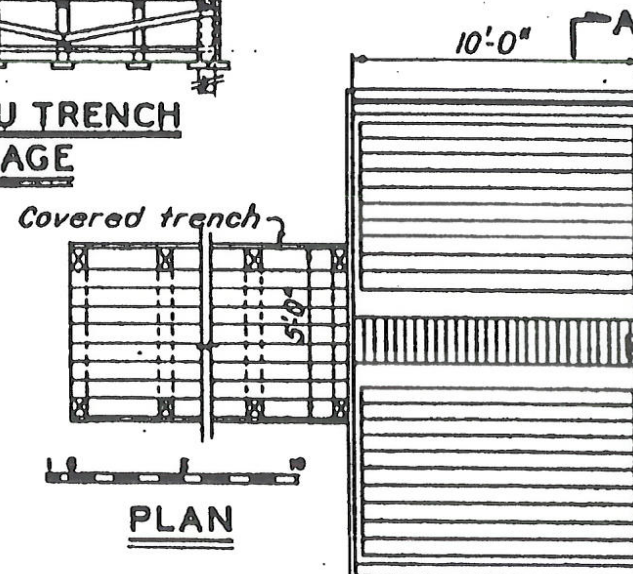
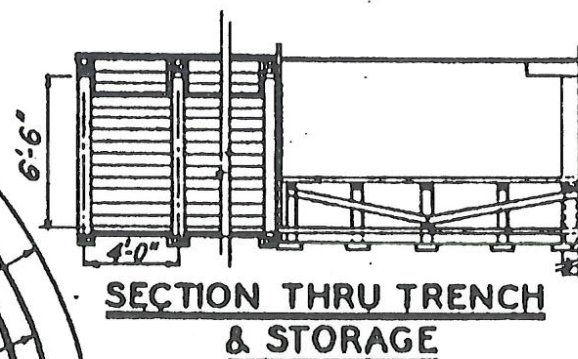
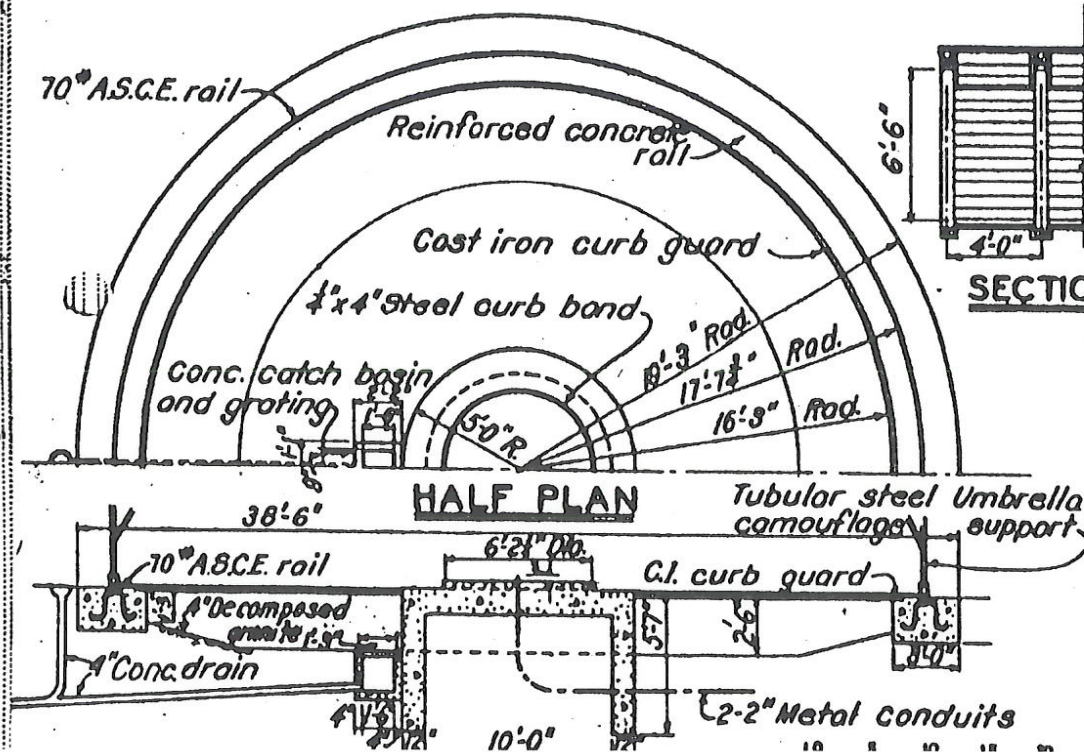
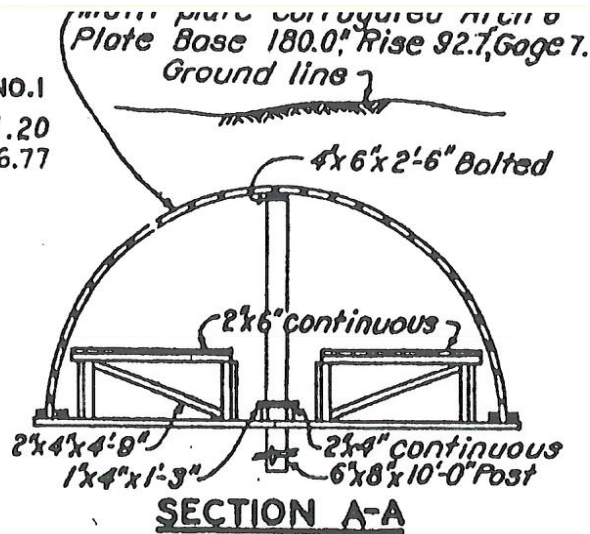
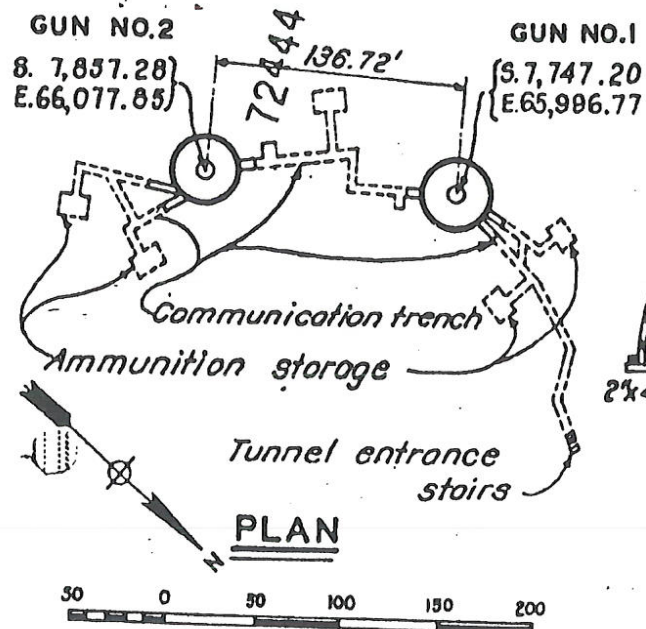
ARMAMENT

Number	Cal.	Length	Model	Serial No.	Manufacturer	Mounted	Type	Model	Serial No.	Manufacturer	Motor
1	155MM										
2	155MM										

Mobile Guns - Mounted by Coast Artillery

BOLSA CHICA PANAMA MOUNTS

U.S. ENGINEER OFFICE, LOS ANGELES, CAL



CONFIDENTIAL

box 64

SPEKM-1

REPORT OF COMPLETED WORKS - SEACOAST FORTIFICATIONS
(Batteries)

HARBOR DEFENSES OF LOS ANGELES

FORT MACARTHUR

BATTERY CONST. NO. 128

No. of guns: 2

Caliber: 16-Inch

Carriage: Barbette

Part I

Corrected to: 23 August 1945

GENERAL:

Battery commenced: 17 April 1943

Battery completed: 21 January 1944 (Curtailed Status)

Date of transfer: 5 January 1945 (Curtailed Status)

Cost to date of transfer: \$758,878.76 (Curtailed Status)

Materials of construction: Reinforced Concrete

Battery new or modernized: New

Trunnion elevation in battery: 49.67 (Not Installed)

Datum plane: Mean Lower Low Water

Origin of coordinates: U.S.C. & G.S. Station "R"
(Deadman's Island)UTILITIES:WATER SUPPLY

Source of: Existing 4" Main

Alternate source: Government Well

Size of main: 6-Inch (From Well)

SEWER:

Connected to sewer: No

Type of disposal: Septic Tank

Type of latrine: Syphon-jet

UTILITIES: (Contd.)ELECTRIC POWER

Sources of: Comm. Power (Minimum Lighting)

Procured & installed by: OOE

Characteristics: Voltage 120/240 AC Phase: Single

Number of units and capacity: None Installed

Max. K.W. required for utilities: 8 K.W. (Lighting)

Max. K.W. required for nonbattle conditions: None

Commercial power provided: Yes Capacity: 10 K.W.

Auxiliary power unit provided: No

Type of lighting fixtures: Direct

Dehumidifying unit: None Installed

Rooms wet or dry: Dry

How ventilated: Natural Ventilation

How heated: Not Heated

DATA TRANSMISSION:

Type: None Installed

REMARKS:

Construction curtailed by directive O.C.E. 26 Nov 1943

File C. of E. 662 (Western Defense Command) SPEKM CM

69618, Subj: "Curtailement of Seacoast Battery Program."

ARMAMENTEmplacement:

Number	Cal.	Length	Model	Serial No.	Manufacturer	Mounted	Type	Model	Serial No.	Manufacturer	Motor
1											
2											

ARMAMENT NOT INSTALLED (CANCELLED BY WAR DEPARTMENT)

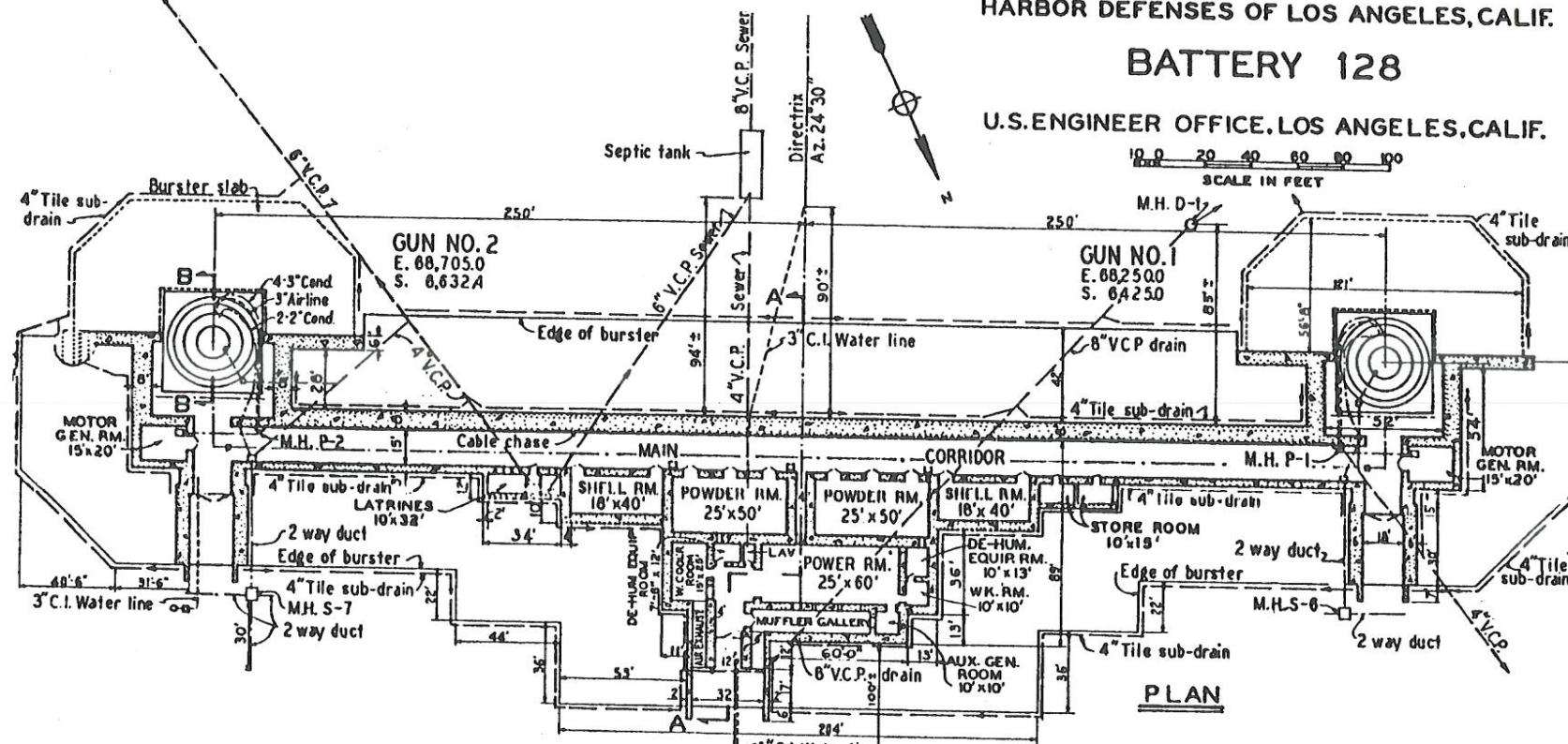
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PART VII

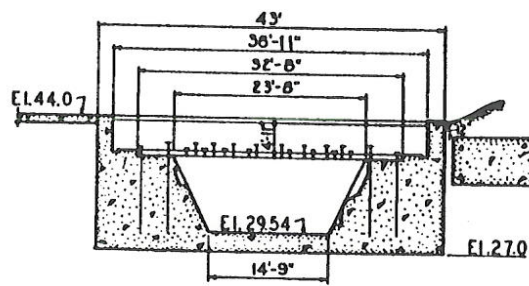
HARBOR DEFENSES OF LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

BATTERY 128

U.S. ENGINEER OFFICE, LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

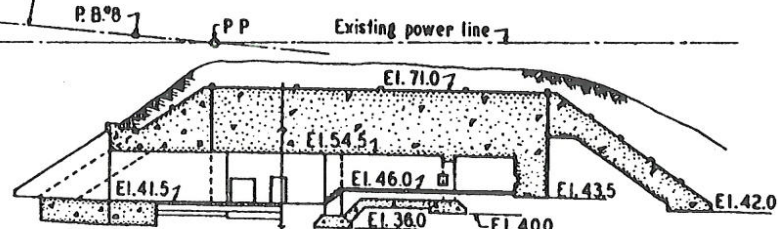


PLAN



SECTION B-B

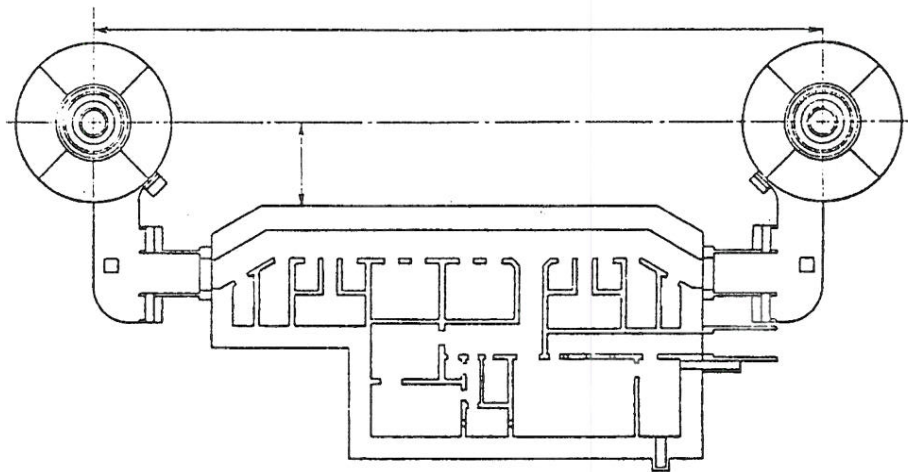
SCALE IN FEET



SECTION A-A

SCALE IN FEET

Battery Construction Number 242



Plan for Battery 246 (very similar to Battery #242)



AMTRA 660 (HDLA)

*Ft. MacArthur
(HDLA)*

Auth: CG AGF

Initials *gpc*

Date: 23 Oct 46

12 September 1946

SUBJECT: Movement of 6" Guns

TO : Commanding General
Sixth Army
Presidio of San Francisco, California
Attention: AMART

1. Reference is made to inclosed map showing location of the two completed 6" batteries, No. 240 at Point Vicente and No. 242 at Bolsa Chica. The former is 8 miles from Fort MacArthur and the latter is 23 miles. There is also shown Battery No. 241, which is complete except for gun tubes. This Battery is on the Upper Reservation and within walking distance of the barracks areas.

2. Assuming that Battery No. 241 will not be completed, it is recommended that the gun tubes from Battery No. 242 be installed in Battery No. 241.

3. This move will have the following advantages:

a. Greatly simplify the civilian component training problem. Motor transportation will not be required for troops in training. A detached battery quartered at Bolsa Chica will be awkward and expensive in every respect.

b. Routine maintenance of battery on Upper Reservation will be much less expensive in manpower and transportation than at Bolsa Chica.

4. The following disadvantages may be raised:

a. The guns at Battery 241 cannot be fired case I as a battery without the removal of defilade of several hundred cubic yards of earth. The seaward field of fire of No. 1 gun is approximately 85 degrees and of No. 2 gun is approximately 110 degrees. The arcs of fire are not overlapping however. This condition can be improved, if not entirely eliminated, by local equipment and labor.

b. The tactical location of Battery 242 is considered more desirable than that of Battery 241. In case of anticipated emergency the gun tubes could be returned to Battery 242 in a very short time.

c. The location of Battery 242 at Bolsa Chica is not ideal for target practice in that all shots will be fired directly over heavily traveled U.S. Highway No. 100 approximately 1000 yards in front of the battery.

CHVCH (BYCOWD)

SECRET

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AMARA 660 (HDLA)

12 September 1946

and the majority of the shots will pass over the private dwellings on Sunset Beach, approximately 1200 yards from the battery and at the same elevation.

6a Movement of the gun tubes can be made without additional expense to the government.

E. R. CROWELL
Colonel, Coast Artillery Corps /
Commanding

Incl:
Location Map 3-4

AMART 660.2

1st Ind.

OCT 20 1946

HC/mje

Headquarters Sixth Army, Presidio of San Francisco, California

TO: Commanding General, Army Ground Forces, Fort Monroe, Virginia.

1. Approved.
2. Approval of the Chief of Ordnance was given in 2nd Ind., Office of the Chief of Ordnance, file O.O.662/688(C), dated 30 March 1945, to letter U.S. Engineer Office, Los Angeles, California, file PADLM-21 LA602.3 (HDLA - Battery 241), dated 8 March 1945, to CG., Ninth Service Command, subject: "Transfer of Battery (Const. No.) 241, Harbor Defenses of Los Angeles".
3. Recommendation for approval of this move has already been made in par. 2 g(5) of letter Headquarters Sixth Army, file AMDCG 660.2, dated 18 September 1946, to War Department Seacoast Defense Armament Board through CG, ACF, subject: "War Department Seacoast Defense Armament Board".

FOR THE COMMANDING GENERAL:

Incl:
No change.

A. G. SCHOFIELD
CAPT
ASSISTANT

88523
88523

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660.2 (C) (12 Sept 46) GWP3 2nd Ind.

HEADQUARTERS, ARMY GROUND FORCES, FORT MONROE, VIRGINIA

23 OCT 1946

TO: Director of Plans and Operations, Washington 25, D. C.

1. Transfer of 6" gun tube from Battery 242 to Battery 541, will facilitate training of civilian components, maintenance and will be accomplished without additional expense to the government.

2. Recommend approval.

FOR THE COMMANDING GENERAL:

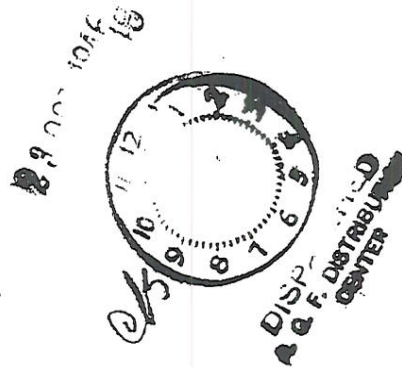
JOHN L. PREIFFER
1st Lt., A. G. D.
Asst. Chd. Adj. Gen.

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD:

1. ~~Idel~~ Subject: Movement of 6" guns.

n/s

2. Ltr, Hqs. Ft. McArthur, file no. AMNMA 660 (HDLA) dated 12 Sept 46 recommends the movement of two 6" gun tubes within Ft. McArthur to aid training. Move can be made without added expense to government. 1st Ind. Hqs 6th Army, 10 Oct 46 recommends approval.



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